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DOCTOR
STRANGE®
THUNDER OF THE SOUL!
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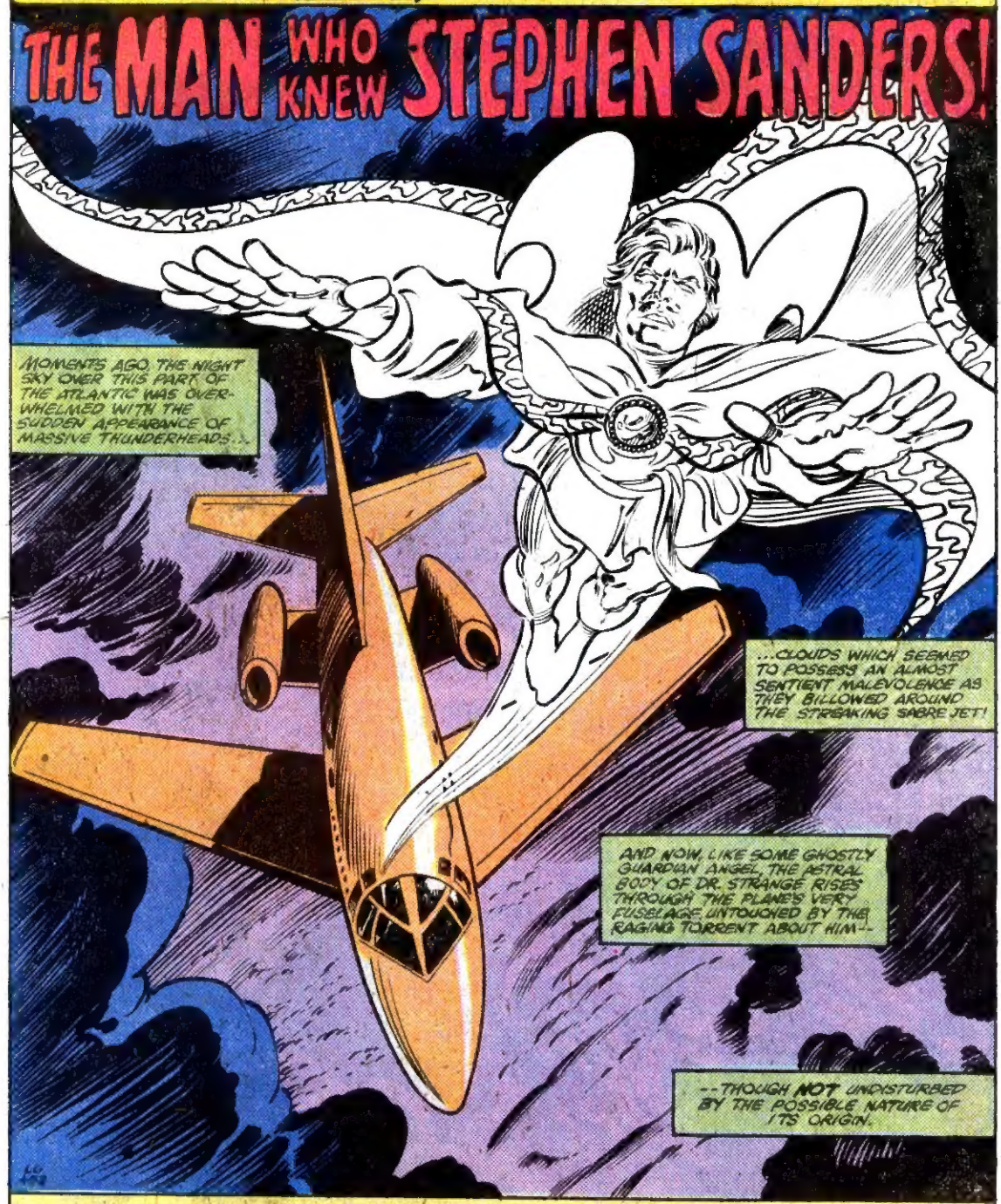
Stan Lee PRESENTS: Dr. STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!™

THE MAN WHO KNEW STEPHEN SANDERS!


MOMENTS AGO, THE NIGHT SKY OVER THIS PART OF THE ATLANTIC WAS OVERWHELMED WITH THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF MASSIVE THUNDERHEADS...
...CLOUDS WHICH SEEMED TO POSSESS AN ALMOST SENTIENT MALEVOLENCE AS THEY BILLOWED AROUND THE STREAKING SABRE JET!
AND NOW, LIKE SOME GHOSTLY GUARDIAN ANGEL, THE ASTRAL BODY OF DR. STRANGE RISES THROUGH THE PLANE'S VERY FUSELAGE UNTOUCHED BY THE RAGING TORRENT ABOUT HIM--
--THOUGH NOT UNDISTURBED BY THE POSSIBLE NATURE OF ITS ORIGIN.

ROGER STERN SCENARIO | RALPH MACCHIO SCRIPT | GENE COLAN & DAN GREEN ARTISTS

JOE ROSEN LETTERER | ROUSSOS COLORIST | ALLEN MILGROM & M.J. DUFFY EDITORS | JIM SHOOTER EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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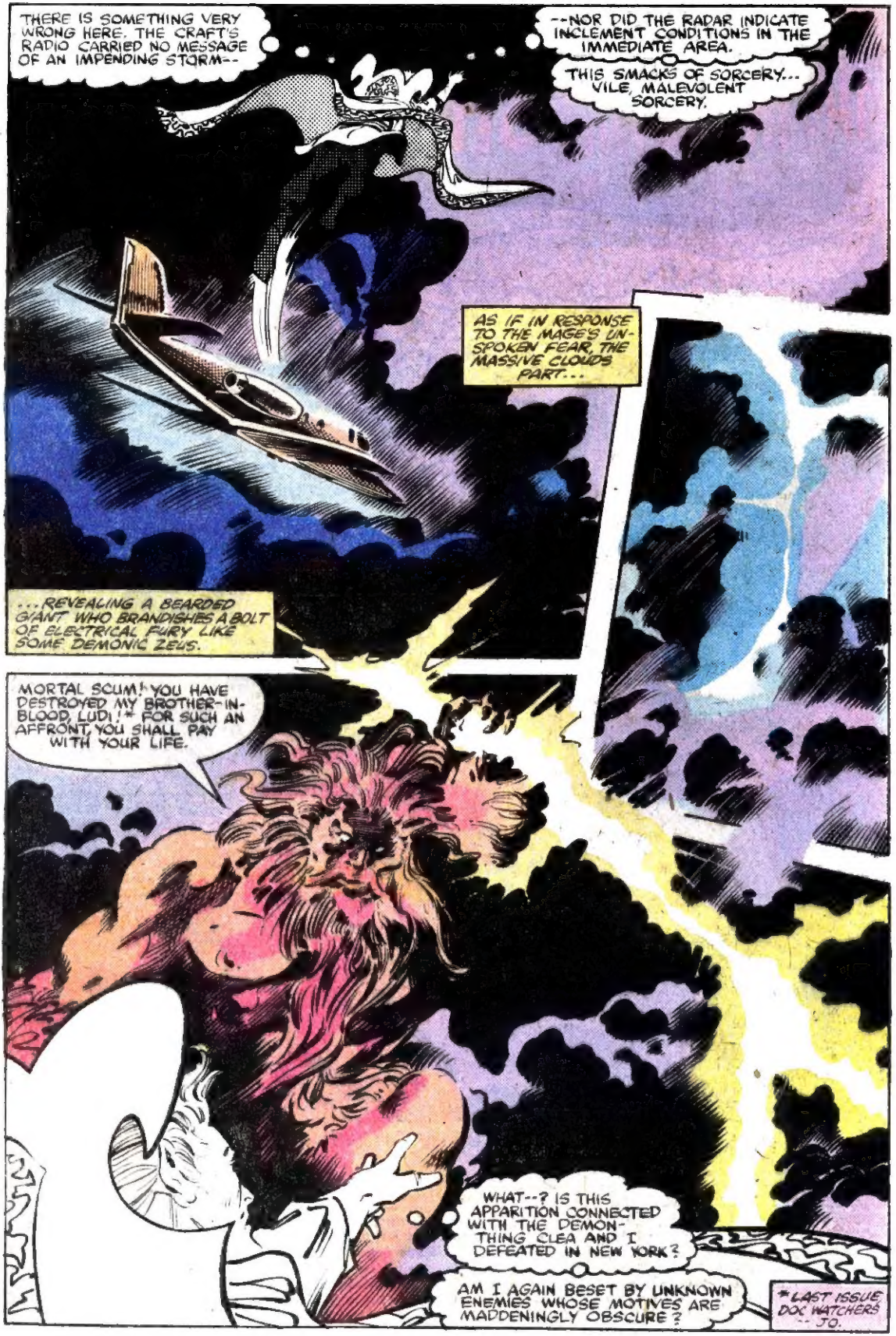
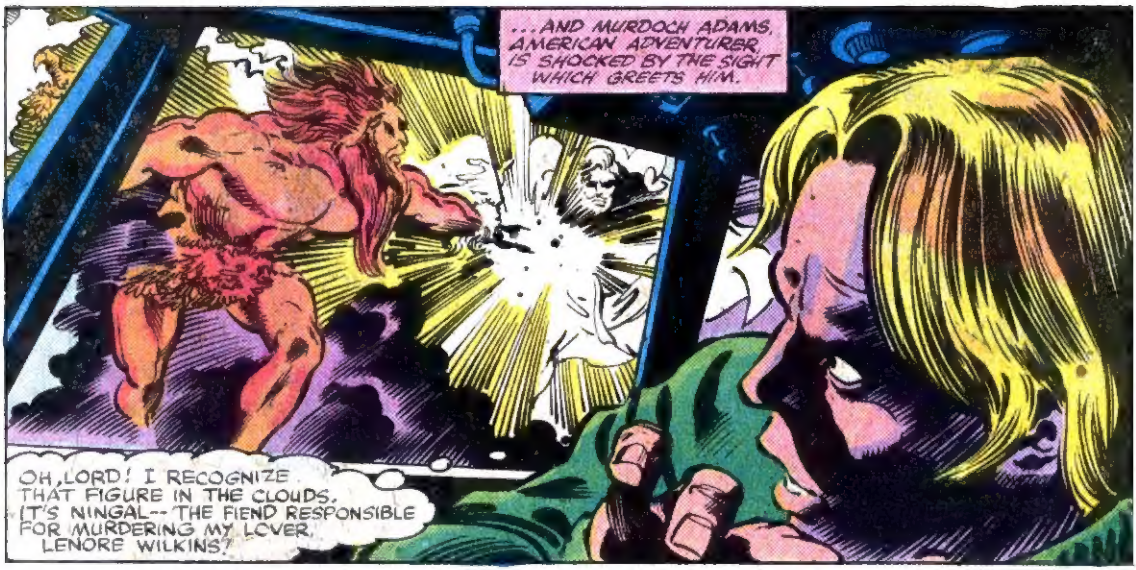
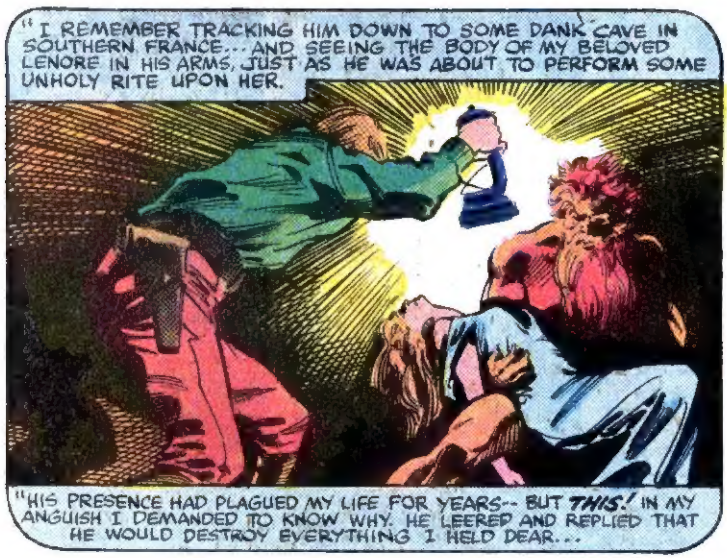

THERE IS SOMETHING VERY WRONG HERE. THE CRAFT'S RADIO CARRIED NO MESSAGE OF AN IMPENDING STORM--
--NOR DID THE RADAR INDICATE INCLEMENT CONDITIONS IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA.
THIS SMACKS OF SORCERY... VILE, MALEVOLENT SORCERY.
AS IF IN RESPONSE TO THE MAGE'S UNSPOKEN FEAR, THE MASSIVE CLOUDS PART...
...REVEALING A BEARDED GIANT WHO BRANDISHES A BOLT OF ELECTRICAL FURY LIKE SOME DEMONIC ZEUS.
MORTAL SCUM! YOU HAVE DESTROYED MY BROTHER-IN-BLOOD, LUD!* FOR SUCH AN AFFRONT, YOU SHALL PAY WITH YOUR LIFE.
WHAT--? IS THIS APPARITION CONNECTED WITH THE DEMON-THING CLEA AND I DEFEATED IN NEW YORK?
AM I AGAIN BESET BY UNKNOWN ENEMIES WHOSE MOTIVES ARE MADDENINGLY OBSCURE?
*LAST ISSUE DOC WATCHERS --JO.

I KNOW OF YOU, SORCERER. TALES OF YOUR SUPPOSED POWER HAVE REACHED DEEPLY INTO THE DIMENSIONS--
--AS WILL TALES OF YOUR DEATH AT MY HANDS!
BY THE VISHANTI! SUCH BOLTS OF BEDEVILMENT COULD WELL DESTROY ME, EVEN IN THIS FORM.
LIKE GREAT WARRING GODS, THE ETHEREAL GIANTS BATTLE ABOVE THE SMALL JET.
WHILE WITHIN THE CRAFT'S COCKPIT...
I CAN ALMOST READ YOUR THOUGHTS, MR. ADAMS. NO-- STEPHEN HAS NOT "PASSED OUT" AS YOU MIGHT SUPPOSE.
HE HAS MERELY RELEASED HIS SPIRIT-FORM TO SEARCH FOR THE CAUSE OF THE SUDDEN STORM OUTSIDE.
A LANCING BURST OF ARCANE ENERGY ILLUMINATES WHAT WOULD OTHERWISE BE INVISIBLE TO THE NAKED, MORTAL EYE...
GRRR
AACKK

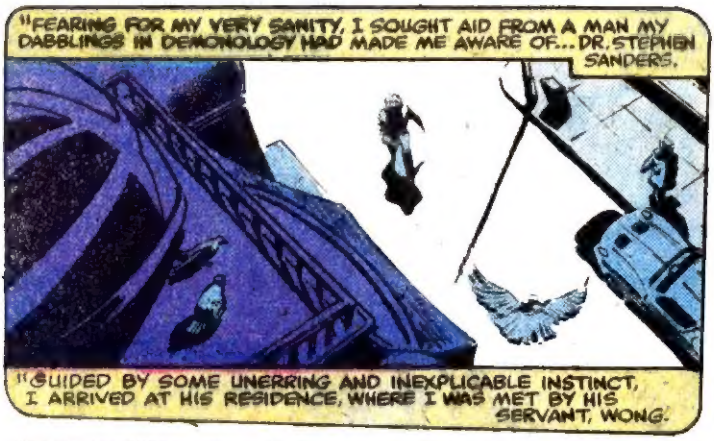

...AND MURDOCH ADAMS, AMERICAN ADVENTURER, IS SHOCKED BY THE SIGHT WHICH GREETS HIM.
OH, LORD! I RECOGNIZE THAT FIGURE IN THE CLOUDS. IT'S NINGAL--THE FIEND RESPONSIBLE FOR MURDERING MY LOVER, LENORE WILKINS?


"I REMEMBER TRACKING HIM DOWN TO SOME DANK CAVE IN SOUTHERN FRANCE... AND SEEING THE BODY OF MY BELOVED LENORE IN HIS ARMS, JUST AS HE WAS ABOUT TO PERFORM SOME UNHOLY RITE UPON HER.
"HIS PRESENCE HAD PLAGUED MY LIFE FOR YEARS-- BUT THIS! IN MY ANGUISH I DEMANDED TO KNOW WHY. HE LEERED AND REPLIED THAT HE WOULD DESTROY EVERYTHING I HELD DEAR...

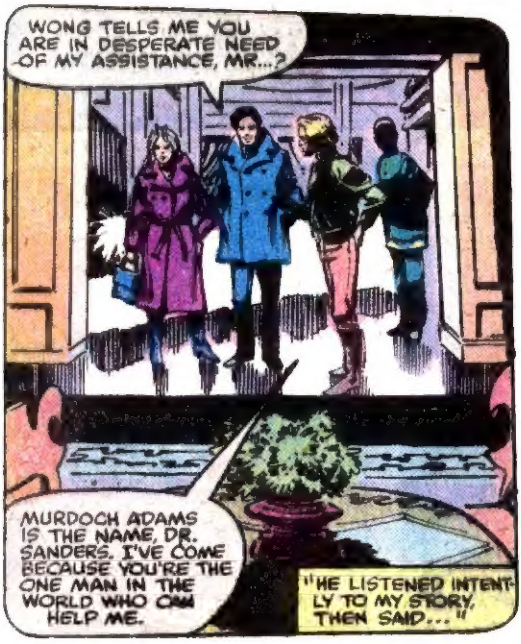
"...BECAUSE OF WHAT I'D DONE TO HIS BROTHER DEMON, LUDI, YEARS BEFORE.*
*SEE CHAMBER OF CHILLS #4 FOR DETAILS. --ALLEN

"AS HE SPOKE, I ACTED, LEAPING UPON HIM AND BRINGING TO BEAR A MYSTIC TALISMAN I HAD ACQUIRED... HOPING TO SUCCEED WITH THAT, WHERE BRUTE STRENGTH NEVER COULD.

"THAT WAS THE LAST THING I REMEMBER, UNTIL YESTERDAY, WHEN I FOUND MYSELF ON A GREENWICH VILLAGE STREETCORNER.*
*READERS OF LAST ISN KNOW THAT AS A RESULT OF THE TALISMAN'S POWER, ADAMS WAS HELD ALONG WITH NINGAL IN AN OTHER-DIMENSIONAL BLOCK OF ENERGY UNTIL THE DWELLER IN DARKNESS RELEASED BOTH FOR HIS OWN ENDS --JO AGAIN.


"FEARING FOR MY VERY SANITY, I SOUGHT AID FROM A MAN MY DABBLINGS IN DEMONOLOGY HAD MADE ME AWARE OF... DR. STEPHEN SANDERS.
"GUIDED BY SOME UNERRING AND INEXPLICABLE INSTINCT, I ARRIVED AT HIS RESIDENCE, WHERE I WAS MET BY HIS SERVANT, WONG.

"HE SEEMED SHOCKED AT FIRST, BUT ALLOWED ME ADMITTANCE DESPITE A RATHER... SUSPICIOUS GAZE.
"HIS MASTER RETURNED HOME MOMENTS LATER."

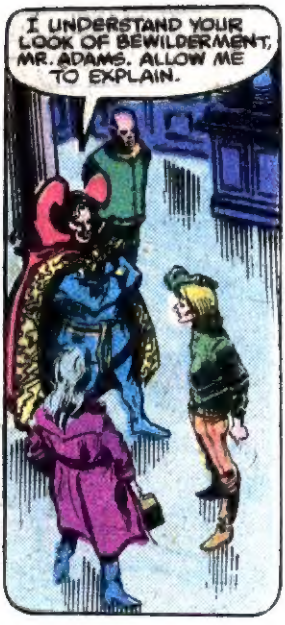

WONG TELLS ME YOU ARE IN DESPERATE NEED OF MY ASSISTANCE, MR...?
MURDOCH ADAMS IS THE NAME, DR. SANDERS. I'VE COME BECAUSE YOU'RE THE ONE MAN IN THE WORLD WHO CAN HELP ME.
"HE LISTENED INTENTLY TO MY STORY, THEN SAID..."

I AGREE TO ASSIST YOU--THOUGH PERHAPS I SHOULD TELL YOU... I AM *NOT* STEPHEN SANDERS.

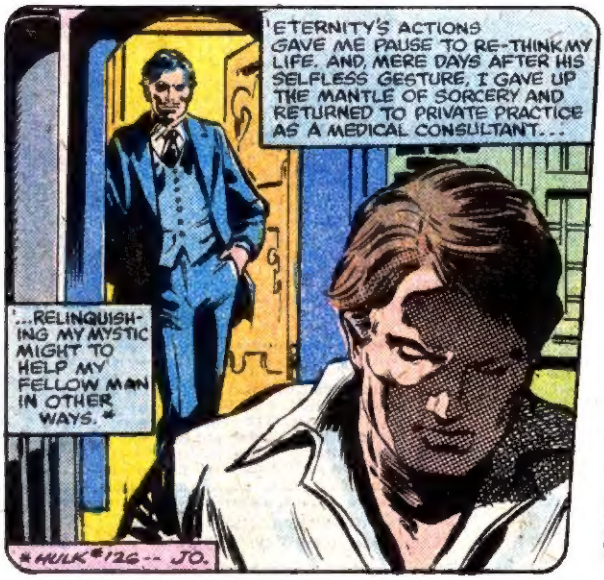
IN FACT, THE MAN OF WHOM YOU SPEAK... NO LONGER EXISTS.

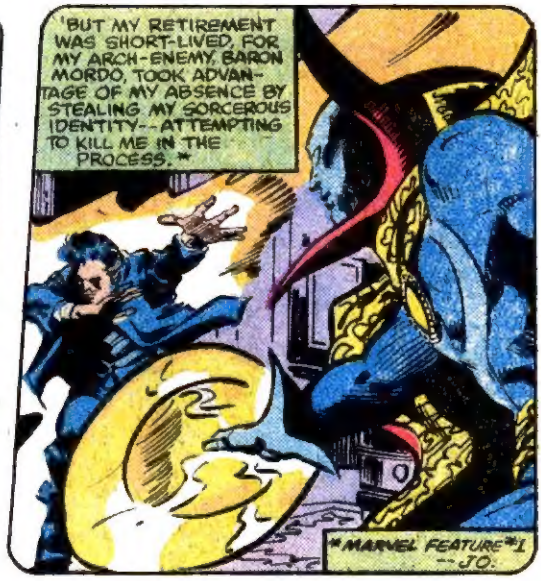
SNAP

I AM STEPHEN STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.


I UNDERSTAND YOUR LOOK OF BEWILDERMENT, MR. ADAMS. ALLOW ME TO EXPLAIN.

ONCE, LONG MONTHS AGO, WHILE EXILED IN SOME FATHOMLESS NETHERWORLD, I WAS FORCED TO CHANGE MY VERY APPEARANCE TO RE-ENTER THE EARTH'S DIMENSION* AND FOR A TIME, I STROVE AGAINST NAMELESS EVIL...
*DR. STRANGE #177 --AL.
"...CLOTHED AS YOU SEE ME HERE.
"IN SUCH GARB I WAS MORE AN ENIGMA TO THE WORLD THAN BEFORE--AS WAS MY WISH. THEN, I FOOLISHLY BLUNDERED AND REVEALED MY NAME TO A FRIGHTENED CROWD WHILE IN MYSTIC CONTENTION WITH MY ANCIENT ENEMY, NIGHTMARE.
"THE AWESOME ENTITY, ETERNITY, FOR WHOM I STRUGGLED, KNEW SUCH A MISHAP WOULD DARKEN MY COMING DAYS. THUS, WITH THE GODLIKE POWER THAT IS HIS, HE ALTERED MY IDENTITY FROM STRANGE TO SANDERS*... ALTERED IT ON EVERY DOCUMENT THAT BORE MY NAME, AND IN ALL THE MINDS OF MEN AS WELL.
"STEPHEN STRANGE WAS DEAD--AND IN HIS PLACE STOOD STEPHEN SANDERS, ALL THIS ETERNITY HAD DECREED, MERELY BECAUSE I HAD SOUGHT TO AID HIM IN WHAT I BELIEVED WAS HIS HOUR OF NEED.
*DR. STRANGE *182--JO.


'ETERNITY'S ACTIONS GAVE ME PAUSE TO RE-THINK MY LIFE. AND, MERE DAYS AFTER HIS SELFLESS GESTURE, I GAVE UP THE MANTLE OF SORCERY AND RETURNED TO PRIVATE PRACTICE AS A MEDICAL CONSULTANT...
'...RELINQUISHING MY MYSTIC MIGHT TO HELP MY FELLOW MAN IN OTHER WAYS.'
*HULK #126 -- JO.

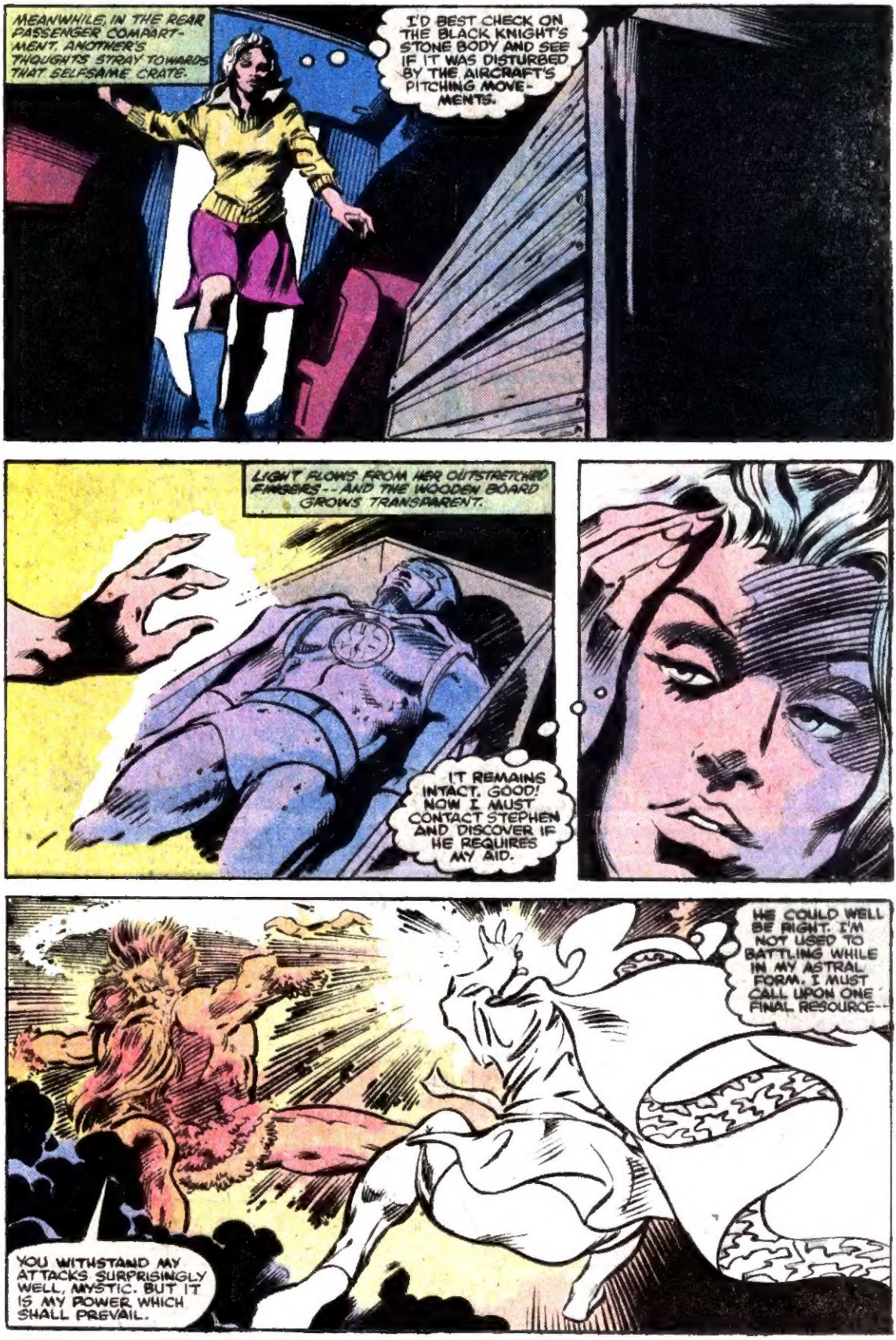

'BUT MY RETIREMENT WAS SHORT-LIVED, FOR MY ARCH-ENEMY, BARON MORDO, TOOK ADVANTAGE OF MY ABSENCE BY STEALING MY SORCEROUS IDENTITY--ATTEMPTING TO KILL ME IN THE PROCESS.'
*MARVEL FEATURE #1 --JO.

'IN HIS WISDOM MY BLESSED MENTOR, THE ANCIENT ONE, INTERCEDED, RETURNING TO ME MY FORSAKEN POWERS THAT I MIGHT DEFEAT MORDO...'
...AND ALSO ERASING THE STEPHEN SANDERS IDENTITY FROM THE WORLD'S CONSCIOUSNESS. ONCE AGAIN, I WAS DOCTOR STRANGE, AND MAGIC WAS MY INESCAPABLE DESTINY.'
*M.F. #1 -- JO.

AT THAT TIME, YOU WERE LOCKED IN ANOTHER DIMENSION WITH NINGAL AT YOUR THROAT AND WERE NOT AFFECTED.
YOU ARE THE ONE MAN DWELLING OUTSIDE THIS DOMICILE WHO KNOWS DR. STEPHEN SANDERS EVER EXISTED.
I'LL PONDER THAT ONE LATER. RIGHT NOW--

--WE MUST GET TO ENGLAND AND INVESTIGATE NINGAL'S DEMON CULT. WHO KNOWS WHAT THEY'VE BEEN UP TO SINCE I DISAPPEARED?!
EXCELLENT. WE WERE JOURNEYING THERE OURSELVES, TONIGHT.

AND NOW WE'RE ON OUR WAY... IF ONLY THERE WASN'T SUCH AN AWFUL STORM OUT THERE.
IT'S FUNNY... STRANGE NEVER EXPLAINED WHAT'S IN THAT WOODEN CRATE HE BROUGHT ALONG--
--EXCEPT TO SAY ITS CONTENTS ARE THE ORIGINAL REASON HE WAS HEADING TO ENGLAND.

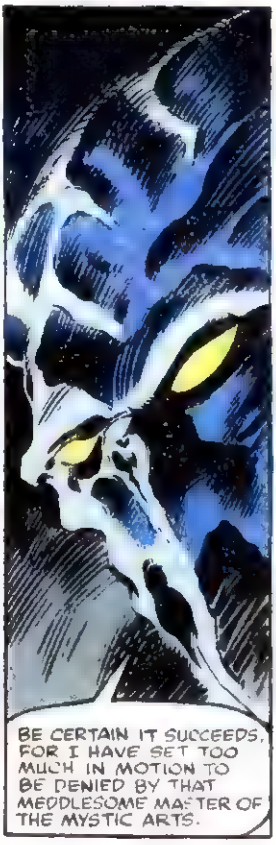

MEANWHILE, IN THE REAR PASSENGER COMPARTMENT, ANOTHER'S THOUGHTS STRAY TOWARDS THAT SELFSAME CRATE.
I'D BEST CHECK ON THE BLACK KNIGHT'S STONE BODY AND SEE IF IT WAS DISTURBED BY THE AIRCRAFT'S PITCHING MOVEMENTS.
LIGHT FLOWS FROM HER OUTSTRETCHED FINGERS--AND THE WOODEN BOARD GROWS TRANSPARENT.
IT REMAINS INTACT. GOOD! NOW I MUST CONTACT STEPHEN AND DISCOVER IF HE REQUIRES MY AID.
HE COULD WELL BE RIGHT. I'M NOT USED TO BATTLING WHILE IN MY ASTRAL FORM. I MUST CALL UPON ONE FINAL RESOURCE--
YOU WITHSTAND MY ATTACKS SURPRISINGLY WELL, MYSTIC. BUT IT IS MY POWER WHICH SHALL PREVAIL.

--THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO!
AAARGGH!
THAT LIGHT-- THAT ACCURSED LIGHT... BURNING... BURNING...
BURNINNN
ZZZZZZZZZZZZ
ODD. HE DISSIPATED INTO MIST SO QUICKLY. WAS IT THE POWER OF THE EYE, OR HAD HE MERELY SERVED HIS PURPOSE -- TO BE REMOVED FROM THE CONFLICT BY ANOTHER, GREATER POWER?
NEVER HAVE I BEEN HAUNTED BY SUCH DOUBTS. I KNOW THERE IS A MALEVOLENT FORCE BEHIND ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED. YET NO PATTERN EMERGES. AM I TO BE DRIVEN MAD BEFORE I DISCOVER THE ANSWER?

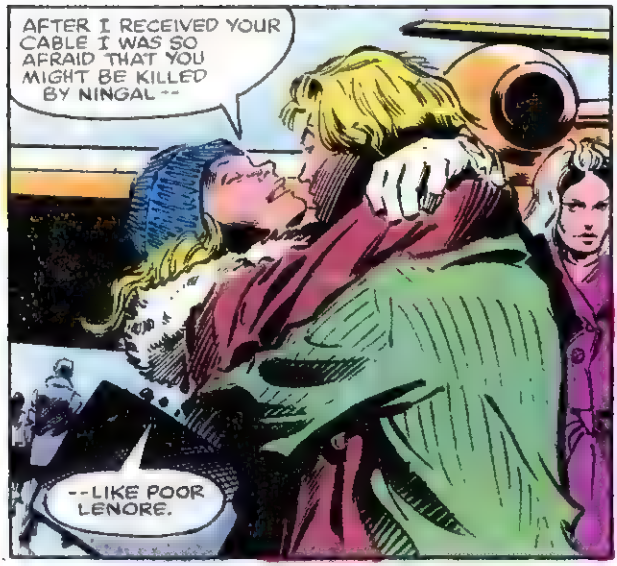
WHAT WILL BE NEXT, I WONDER.
YOU LOOK PALE, MURDOCH... AS IF YOU'D SEEN A GHOST.
HUH?!
IT'S JUST THE STORM, DOCTOR-- NOTHING MORE.
THE BRIGHT SUN DISPELS THE THICK FOG ABOVE LONDON'S HEATHROW AIRPORT, THOUGH IT DOES LITTLE TO DISPEL THE DOUBTS WHICH TROUBLE THE MIND OF DOCTOR STRANGE.
WHILE, ENDLESS WORLDS AWAY, THE DEMONIC FIGURE OF MINGAL CONGEALS WHERE NO SUN'S LIGHT HAS EVER SHONE.
DWELLER, I COULD HAVE DESTROYED THE MAGICIAN. I WOULD HAVE OVERCOME THE AMULET'S ENCHANTMENT. WHY DID YOU SUMMON ME HENCE? WHY?!
FOR WHAT HE DID TO LUDI, I WOULD HAVE BROUGHT HIM HERE TO GROVEL AT OUR FEET BEFORE I CLAWED THE FLESH FROM HIS BONES.

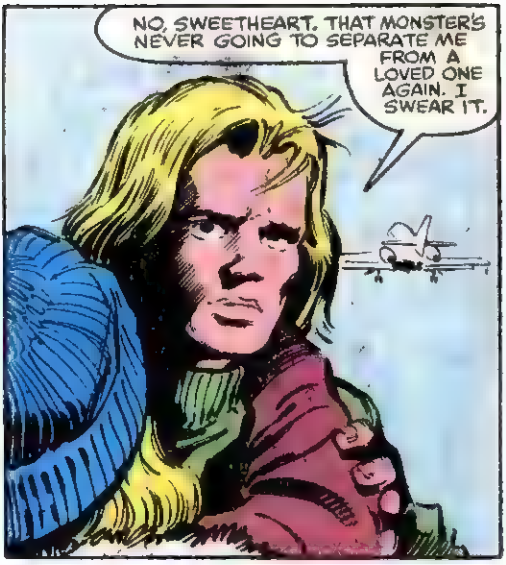
YOU RAVE LIKE A FOOL, NINGAL. I COULD CRUSH STRANGE *PHYSICALLY* WHENEVER I DESIRE!
BUT IT IS HIS SPIRIT I CRAVE-- HIS VERY WILL WHICH I MUST DRAIN OF ITS LIFE FORCE WITH THE POWER OF THE GREAT FEAR!
NOW, HAVE YOUR WORTHLESS FOLLOWERS IN ENGLAND FINISHED THE PREPARATIONS THAT I ORDERED?

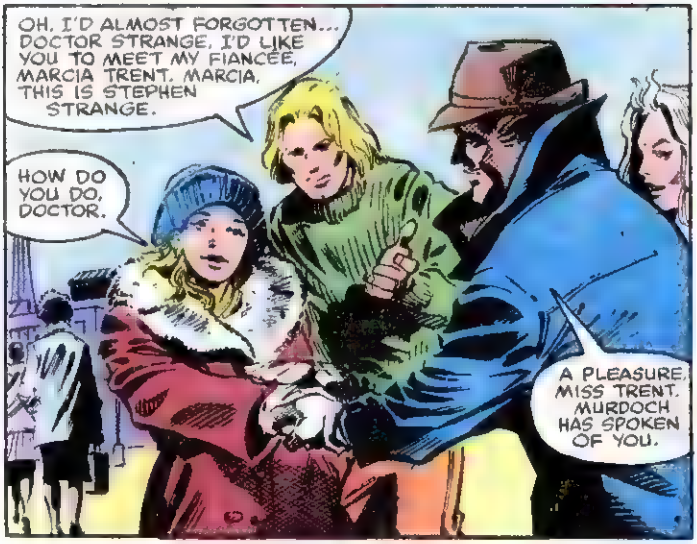
YES, GREAT DWELLER. THEY BUT AWAIT YOUR COMMAND.. SPEAK, AND THE TRAP WILL BE SPRUNG.


BE CERTAIN IT SUCCEEDS, FOR I HAVE SET TOO MUCH IN MOTION TO BE DENIED BY THAT MEDDLESOME MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS.

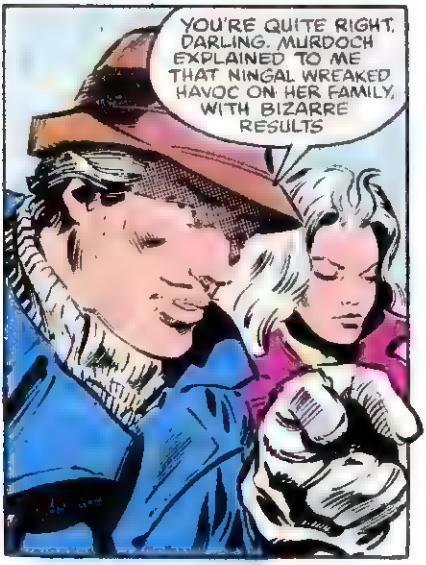
DIMENSIONS DISTANT, THE SUBJECTS OF THAT DEADLY DISCUSSION GRATEFULLY DISEMBARK FROM THEIR AIRCRAFT TO ALIGHT ON BRITISH SOIL.
MURDOCH! MURDOCH, THANK HEAVEN YOU'RE SAFE.
MARCIA!


AFTER I RECEIVED YOUR CABLE I WAS SO AFRAID THAT YOU MIGHT BE KILLED BY NINGAL --
--LIKE POOR LENORE.

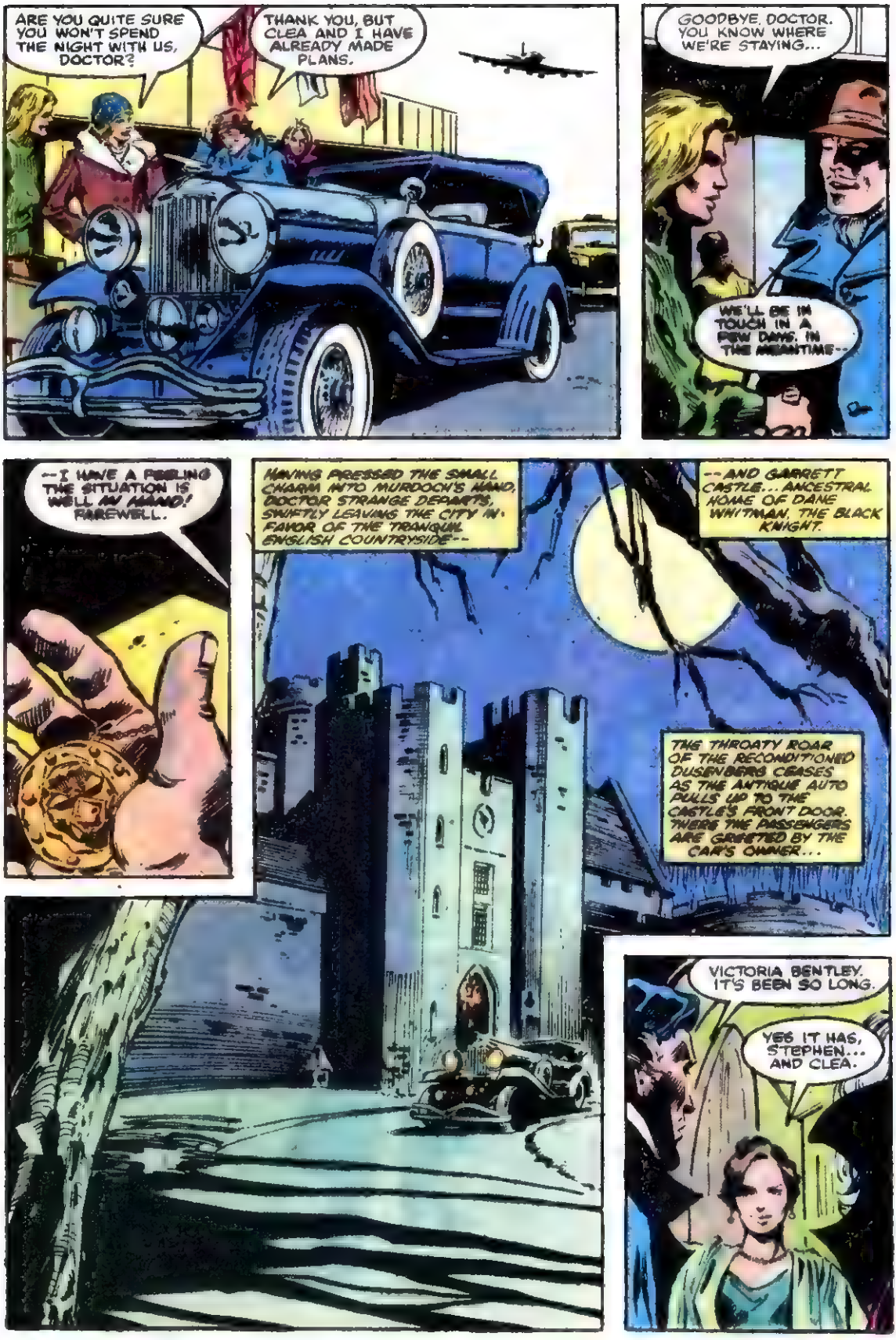

NO, SWEETHEART. THAT MONSTER'S NEVER GOING TO SEPARATE ME FROM A LOVED ONE AGAIN. I SWEAR IT.


OH, I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN... DOCTOR STRANGE, I'D LIKE YOU TO MEET MY FIANCÉE, MARCIA TRENT. MARCIA, THIS IS STEPHEN STRANGE.
HOW DO YOU DO, DOCTOR.
A PLEASURE, MISS TRENT. MURDOCH HAS SPOKEN OF YOU.

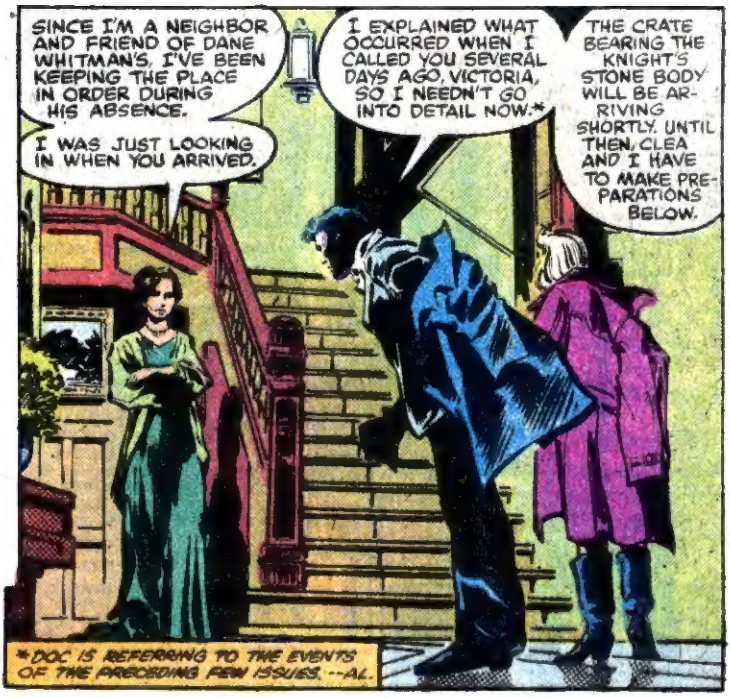
THEY SEEM VERY MUCH IN LOVE. DON'T THEY, CLEA?
STEPHEN, THERE IS SOMETHING ODD ABOUT THAT WOMAN. I CAN SENSE IT. SHE'S... MARKED SOMEHOW.

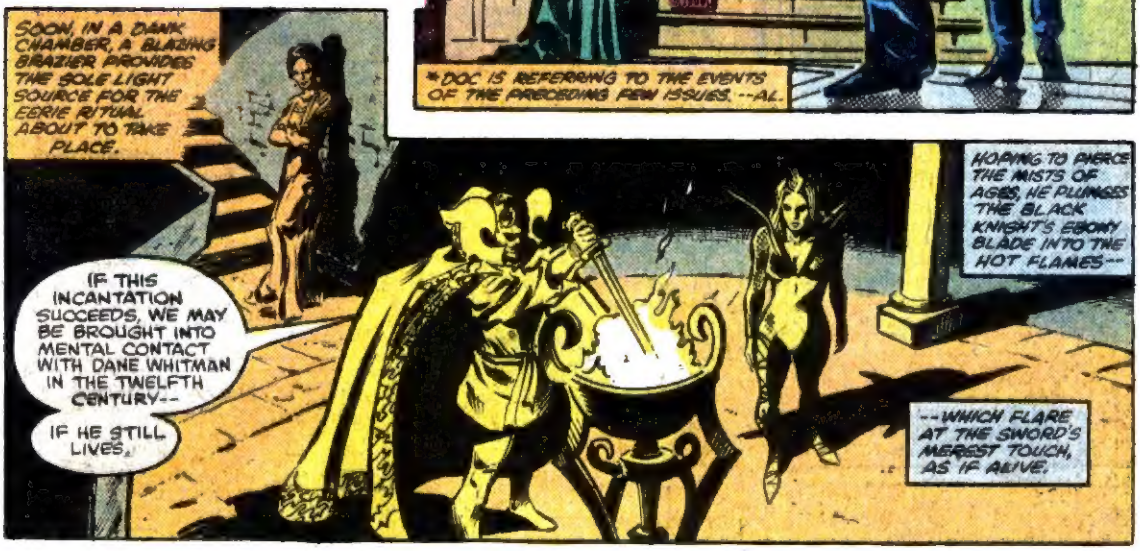

YOU'RE QUITE RIGHT, DARLING. MURDOCH EXPLAINED TO ME THAT NINGAL WREAKED HAVOC ON HER FAMILY, WITH BIZARRE RESULTS

AS YOU CAN SEE... THE GIRL CASTS NO SHADOW.
INDEED.

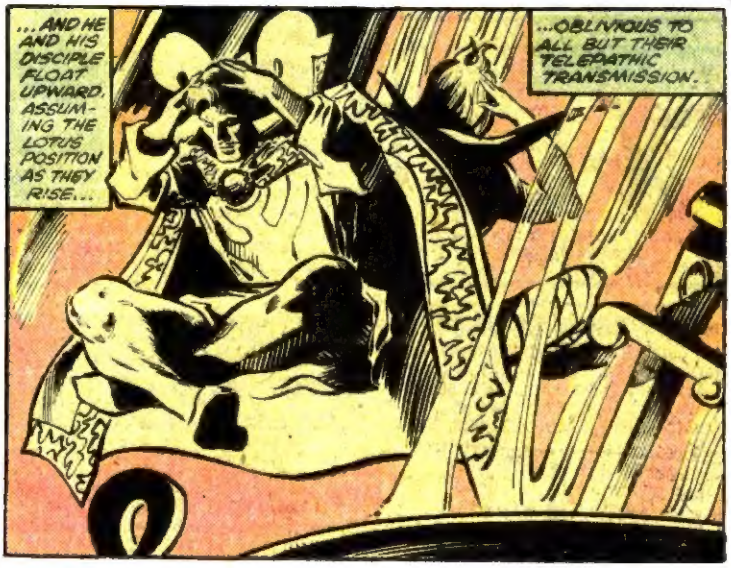

ARE YOU QUITE SURE YOU WON'T SPEND THE NIGHT WITH US, DOCTOR?
THANK YOU, BUT CLEA AND I HAVE ALREADY MADE PLANS.
GOODBYE, DOCTOR. YOU KNOW WHERE WE'RE STAYING...
WE'LL BE IN TOUCH IN A FEW DAYS. IN THE MEANTIME--
--I HAVE A FEELING THE SITUATION IS WELL IN HAND! FAREWELL.
HAVING PRESSED THE SMALL CHARM INTO MURDOCH'S HAND, DOCTOR STRANGE DEPARTS, SWIFTLY LEAVING THE CITY IN FAVOR OF THE TRANQUIL ENGLISH COUNTRYSIDE--
--AND GARRETT CASTLE... ANCESTRAL HOME OF DANE WHITMAN, THE BLACK KNIGHT.
THE THROATY ROAR OF THE RECONDITIONED DUSENBERG CEASES AS THE ANTIQUE AUTO PULLS UP TO THE CASTLE'S FRONT DOOR. THERE THE PASSENGERS ARE GREETED BY THE CAR'S OWNER...
VICTORIA BENTLEY. IT'S BEEN SO LONG.
YES IT HAS, STEPHEN... AND CLEA.

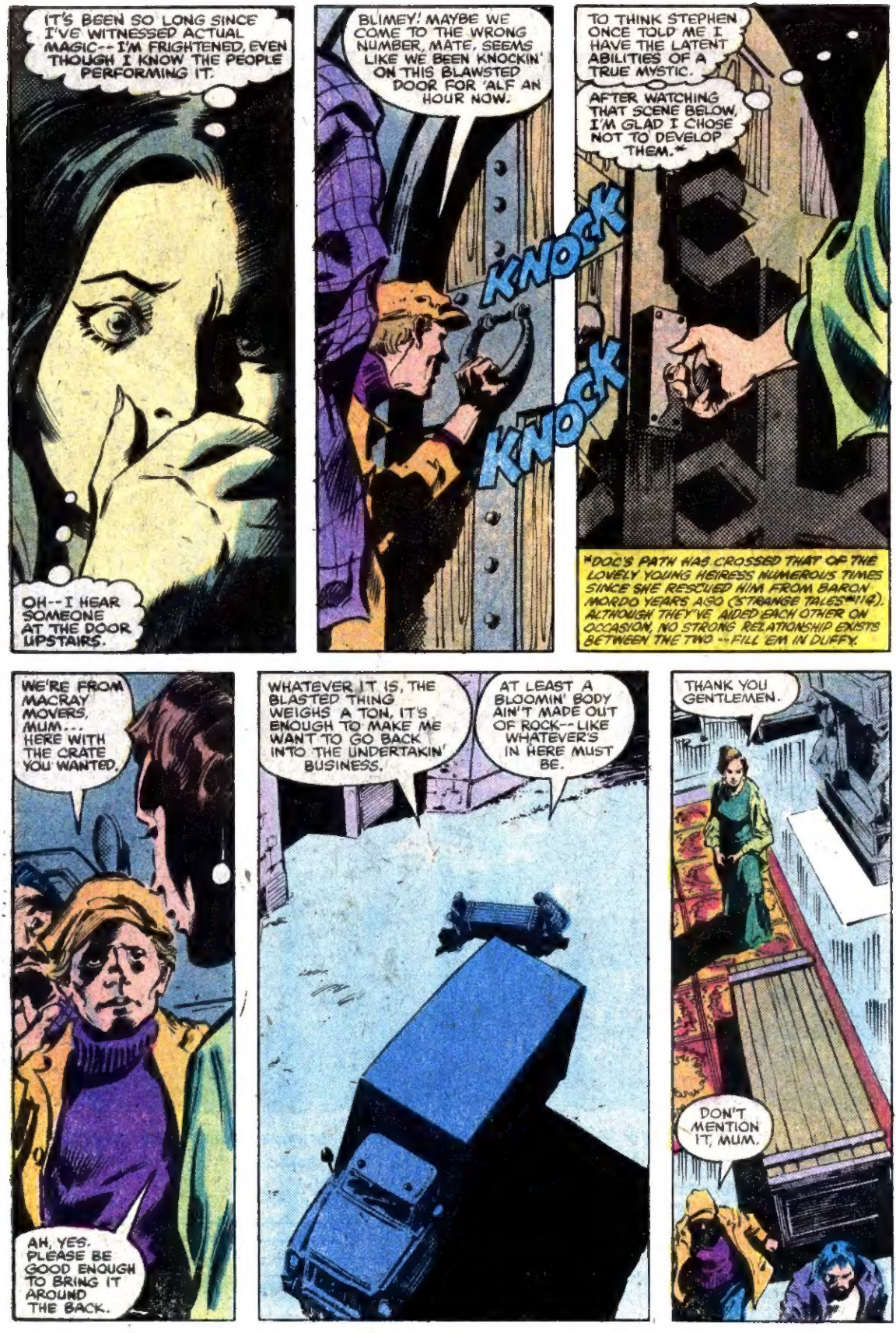
I HAVE NEVER LIKED MISS BENTLEY. THE WAY SHE PLAYS UP TO STEPHEN, HOPING TO MAKE A SCENE... HOW CHILDISH.
AH...HAVE YOU BEEN HERE LONG?


SINCE I'M A NEIGHBOR AND FRIEND OF DANE WHITMAN'S, I'VE BEEN KEEPING THE PLACE IN ORDER DURING HIS ABSENCE.
I WAS JUST LOOKING IN WHEN YOU ARRIVED.
I EXPLAINED WHAT OCCURRED WHEN I CALLED YOU SEVERAL DAYS AGO, VICTORIA, SO I NEEDN'T GO INTO DETAIL NOW.*
THE CRATE BEARING THE KNIGHT'S STONE BODY WILL BE ARRIVING SHORTLY. UNTIL THEN, CLEA AND I HAVE TO MAKE PREPARATIONS BELOW.
*DOC IS REFERRING TO THE EVENTS OF THE PRECEDING FEW ISSUES. --AL.


SOON, IN A DANK CHAMBER, A BLAZING BRAZIER PROVIDES THE SOLE LIGHT SOURCE FOR THE EERIE RITUAL ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE.
IF THIS INCANTATION SUCCEEDS, WE MAY BE BROUGHT INTO MENTAL CONTACT WITH DANE WHITMAN IN THE TWELFTH CENTURY--
IF HE STILL LIVES.
HOPING TO PIERCE THE MISTS OF AGES, HE PLUNGES THE BLACK KNIGHT'S EBONY BLADE INTO THE HOT FLAMES--
--WHICH FLARE AT THE SWORD'S MEREST TOUCH, AS IF ALIVE.

PERHAPS FEARING WHAT IS TO COME, THE MYSTIC MASTER HESITANTLY REMOVES HIS HANDS FROM THE SWORD HILT...


...AND HE AND HIS DISCIPLE FLOAT UPWARD, ASSUMING THE LOTUS POSITION AS THEY RISE...
...OBLIVIOUS TO ALL BUT THEIR TELEPATHIC TRANSMISSION.


IT'S BEEN SO LONG SINCE I'VE WITNESSED ACTUAL MAGIC--I'M FRIGHTENED, EVEN THOUGH I KNOW THE PEOPLE PERFORMING IT.
OH--I HEAR SOMEONE AT THE DOOR UPSTAIRS.
BLIMEY! MAYBE WE COME TO THE WRONG NUMBER, MATE, SEEMS LIKE WE BEEN KNOCKIN' ON THIS BLAWSTED DOOR FOR 'ALF AN HOUR NOW.
KNOCK
KNOCK
TO THINK STEPHEN ONCE TOLD ME I HAVE THE LATENT ABILITIES OF A TRUE MYSTIC.
AFTER WATCHING THAT SCENE BELOW, I'M GLAD I CHOSE NOT TO DEVELOP THEM.*
*DOC'S PATH HAS CROSSED THAT OF THE LOVELY YOUNG HEIRESS NUMEROUS TIMES SINCE SHE RESCUED HIM FROM BARON MORDO YEARS AGO (STRANGE TALES #114). ALTHOUGH THEY'VE AIDED EACH OTHER ON OCCASION, NO STRONG RELATIONSHIP EXISTS BETWEEN THE TWO--FILL 'EM IN DUFFY.
WE'RE FROM MACRAY MOVERS, MUM... HERE WITH THE CRATE YOU WANTED.
AH, YES. PLEASE BE GOOD ENOUGH TO BRING IT AROUND THE BACK.
WHATEVER IT IS, THE BLASTED THING WEIGHS A TON, IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE ME WANT TO GO BACK INTO THE UNDERTAKIN' BUSINESS.
AT LEAST A BLOOMIN' BODY AIN'T MADE OUT OF ROCK--LIKE WHATEVER'S IN HERE MUST BE.
THANK YOU GENTLEMEN.
DON'T MENTION IT, MUM.

I KNOW I REALLY SHOULDN'T PRY THIS LID OPEN...
...BUT I CAN'T RESIST AFTER WHAT STEPHEN SAID ABOUT DANE'S BODY BEING TURNED TO STONE.
PERHAPS I MIGHT EVEN HELP HIM AND NOT FEEL SO USELESS.
CREEAAK
ANYWAY, THERE COULDN'T BE ANY HARM IN LOOKING.
AND, LIKE A PRESENT-DAY PANDORA, VICTORIA BENTLEY'S CURIOSITY PROVES TO BE HER UNDOING.
HE HAS SUCH A PLACID, ALMOST SERENE LOOK ON H-- OH MY LORD-- HIS FACE!
HIS FACE!
EEEE!!!!
CLEA, QUICKLY-- UPSTAIRS! THAT WAS VICTORIA SCREAMING!

IS STEPHEN'S CONCERN THAT WHICH HE WOULD SHOW TOWARDS ANY WOMAN-- OR IS IT SOMETHING MORE, SOMETHING DEEPER...?
BUT SUCH PETTY CONCERNS ARE BANISHED AS THEY ASCEND THE STAIRS TO FIND..,
S-STEPHEN, THE BLACK KNIGHT'S BODY! AND IN ITS ARMS... VICTORIA BENTLEY.
BUT IT BEARS THE DEMONIC FEATURES OF-- NINGAL!
NEXT "AND FEAR, THE FINAL VICTOR!"